



Updated September 13, 2024

Turkey (Türkiye)-U.S. Relations: Timeline and Brief Historical Context

This timeline tracks major from the beginning of close U.S.-Turkey (Türkiye) ties after World War II to the present. The information provides context for lawmakers assessing the tenor and trajectory of current bilateral relations on issues ranging from general strategic cooperation to timely regional concerns and domestic Turkish politics.

Early Cold War Partners (1945-1962)

Soviet pressure on the Turkish government to allow free passage through the Turkish straits (the Bosphorus and Dardanelles) and its territorial claims in eastern Anatolia threatened to precipitate hostilities between the two states, whose predecessors (the Russian and Ottoman Empires) had fought 12 wars over the preceding four centuries. Turkey turned to the United States for support. Mutual opposition to Soviet expansion would underpin Turkey-U.S. ties in the coming decades.

- 1945 Turkey declares war on Germany and Japan in February; becomes founding member of the United Nations
- 1946 In response to Soviet demands on Turkey for shared administration of the straits, the United States counters Soviet pressure by sending ships to Turkish waters
- 1947 Congress designates Turkey (along with Greece) a special recipient of anti-Soviet aid under the **Truman Doctrine**
- 1950 Turkish troops join U.S.-U.N. forces in the Korean War
- 1952 Turkey becomes a member of the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**
- 1954 U.S. and Turkey agree to joint use of what becomes **Incirlik Air Base**; U.S. and Turkey sign first status of forces agreement
- 1960 **First military coup** in Turkey; civilian rule returns with elections in 1961
- 1962 Resolution of **Cuban Missile Crisis** includes U.S. agreement to remove nuclear-armed Jupiter missiles (judged by the United States to be obsolete) from Turkey

Allies amid Challenges (1963-1978)

U.S.-Turkey relations were particularly challenged by Turkey's frequent clashes with fellow NATO member Greece over the ethnically divided island of Cyprus. Anti-Americanism grew as Turks increasingly debated the benefits and drawbacks of the bilateral relationship.

- 1964 Letter from President Lyndon Johnson to Turkish Prime Minister Ismet Inonu communicates U.S. opposition to

Turkish intervention in **Cyprus** after ethnic Greek-Turkish power sharing breaks down

- 1971 Turkey's **second military coup** occurs with the government's resignation amid increasing street violence; elections resume in 1973
- 1974 Turkey, using U.S.-supplied equipment, occupies the northern third of the island of Cyprus (an occupation that has continued to the present) on behalf of Turkish Cypriot minority, following a coup that installed a more pro-Greek government on the island
- 1975 Congress freezes aid and imposes **arms embargo** on Turkey for its actions in Cyprus
- Turkey abrogates U.S. status of forces agreement; takes control of U.S. installations; U.S. forces performing NATO functions remain
- 1978 After intense lobbying by multiple presidential Administrations and several votes to partially lift the embargo, Congress fully repeals it

Renewed Military Cooperation (1980-1991)

The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Iran's Islamic Revolution heightened the strategic importance of the Turkey-U.S. relationship for American interests in the broader Middle East.

- 1980 United States and Turkey sign Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement
- Turkey's **third coup** in response to social and political turmoil; elections resume in 1983
- 1984 Kurdistan Workers' Party (**PKK**) begins significant operations in its armed insurgency in southeastern Turkey
- 1991 Turkey allows the use of its airspace and bases for U.S. and coalition aircraft participating in Gulf War and for the postwar patrolling of northern Iraq

Reassessment (1991-2002)

Turkey's relative importance for U.S. policymakers declined in the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, but focus remained on a number of regional developments involving Turkey.

- 1991- United States announces closure of 8 of its 12 military bases in Turkey; **major U.S. military grant aid to Turkey discontinued** in post-Cold War environment
- 1992 **PKK-led Kurdish insurgency** intensifies in Turkey

- 1994 Congress **withholds military loans** to Turkey until submission of executive branch report on alleged human rights violations in relations to Turkey-PKK violence
- 1997 Turkish military compels the removal of a government led by an Islamist prime minister
U.S. designates the PKK as a foreign terrorist organization
- 1999 Turkey captures PKK leader **Abdullah Ocalan** with U.S. assistance; PKK declares ceasefire
- 2001 Turkey joins the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan

AKP and the Middle East (2003-2012)

After the 2002 election of Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (known in Turkish as the AKP), and Erdogan's election as prime minister in 2003, Turkey-U.S. relations were shaped by Turkey's growing economic and political clout in the Middle East.

- 2003 PKK resumes insurgency and attacks against Turkey from safe havens in northern Iraq
- 2010 Turkey downgrades ties with **Israel** after ten Turkish citizens die following Israel's raid on the *Mavi Marmara* (part of an activist-led flotilla seeking humanitarian relief for the Gaza Strip)
- 2011 Turkey agrees to U.S./NATO deployment of **missile defense radar** on its territory

More Challenges to Cooperation (2013-2021)

Factors driving U.S.-Turkey tensions include the conflict in Syria and Turkey's purchase of a Russian S-400 air defense system. Domestic developments, including the July 2016 coup attempt and Erdogan's increased consolidation of political control, have further challenged bilateral relations.

- 2013 Nationwide protests and corruption allegations increase domestic and Western criticism of Erdogan
- 2014 U.S.-Turkey differences deepen in Syria over jihadists' alleged use of Turkish territory and U.S. support for PKK-aligned **Syrian Kurds**;
Erdogan elected president
- 2016 After July coup attempt, Turkey requests that the United States extradite influential Turkish figure **Fethullah Gulen**, and begins direct military operations in Syria to counter the Islamic State and Kurdish-led forces
- 2017 U.S. begins directly arming PKK-linked Kurdish forces in Syria against Turkish wishes
Constitutional changes expanding presidential powers narrowly approved by **referendum**
- 2018 President Erdogan wins reelection
- 2019 Turkey takes delivery of **S-400 system** from **Russia**; the United States removes Turkey from F-35 program; some Members of Congress reportedly place **informal holds** on major arms sales to Turkey

- In **northeastern Syria**, Turkish-led forces attack the U.S.-backed Syrian Kurdish forces mentioned above, increasing the Syrian territory Turkey administers along its border, and triggering strong U.S. criticism
- 2020 Turkey's successful use of **drone aircraft** against Russian-origin equipment in Syria and elsewhere gains it greater global notoriety linked with its arms exports
Eastern Mediterranean maritime border and energy disputes intensify between Turkey and some NATO countries and other U.S. partners
The Trump Administration imposes **sanctions** on Turkey's arms procurement agency and some of its officials for the S-400 acquisition
- 2021 President Biden characterizes Ottoman Empire actions against Armenians during World War I as **genocide** (the House and Senate passed resolutions of similar substance in 2019)

Allies in a New Era (2022-Present)

The Russia-Ukraine war and responses within NATO come as Turkey and other mid-size powers are gauging how to use their relationships with great powers to maximize their regional and global influence.

- 2022 Russia's invasion of **Ukraine** leads to a multi-faceted Turkish response: some military and political support for Ukraine, and increased economic and energy ties with Russia; Turkey mediates between the warring parties (including on a 2022-2023 Black Sea Grain Initiative)
Sweden and Finland seek NATO accession; Turkey demands they take action against people Turkey deems to be terrorists as a condition to approving accession
- 2023 The Biden Administration declares its support for a possible **F-16 sale** to Turkey to strengthen its air force and NATO cohesion; Turkey approves Finland's accession into NATO, but some in Congress demand Sweden's accession before supporting the F-16 sale
President Erdogan is reelected again
October outbreak of war between **Israel and Hamas** increases Turkey-Israel tension, including because of Erdogan's political support for Hamas
- 2024 Turkey approves Sweden's accession into NATO; U.S. F-16 sale to Turkey advances at the same time as a possible **F-35 sale to Greece**
AKP faces major losses in local elections
Turkey announces trade suspension with Israel related to war in Gaza
Turkey expresses interest in joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and reportedly applies to join the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) organization

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IF10487

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